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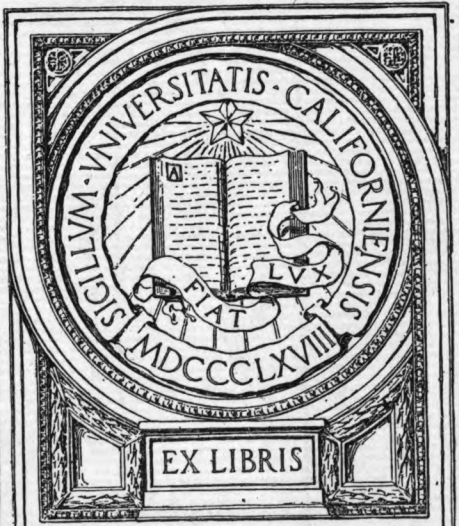

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California and Western Verses

By LAURENCE EDWARD INNES

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IT'S CALIFORNIA CHRISTMAS TIME

It's Christmas time! And the bluebird sings,
And the morning dew to the green grass clings,
And over the hills and far away
Is the strangest kind of a Christmas day.
Oh Santa Claus in the lightest clothes
Is skipping from pink clouds as he goes,
And saying, "My goodness, it's hot today,
How in the world did they get this way."
He waves a fan made of great palm leaves,
And his airship darts from eaves to eaves
Of the green and the purple bungalows
That stand in such dainty graceful rows.
Then he winks his eye, and the day is here,
And all about him is Christmas cheer,
But never a snow flake flutters by,
And never a chill wind breathes a sigh,
And the sun goes up, and the sun goes down—
And it's Christmas Day in a palm tree town.

CALIFORNIA

If a pot of gold and a crimson rose
And wealth and color that no one knows
Conspired to produce a place for men
Where trouble would never come again,
They might succeed, but I often think
That of all the cups from which men drink,
There is no nectar like these far skies,
No sound of surf like the surf that lies

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In the warm embrace of this Southern land;
And surely no smile or more friendly hand
Could meet a stranger than one meets here.
If you come for a day, if you stay a year
Oh! Here is a place where the flowers and sun
Belong, or seemingly so, to everyone—
Oh, here is a place where a man may say
"I'm glad I have lived and have passed this way."

SUNSET

A sunset with the scent of flowers to kiss the day,
To walk into the heart of night in such array
Of gilded thoughts, bedecked with such gay dreams,
Can this be I? Indeed it almost seems
As though a mantle clung to me
And I were some brave cavalier
Of gallant mien and fancy free,
Strangely waiting for a trysting here.

O lavender and violet day, good bye!
Brown hills that mother us, I sigh
To see the rapture sweep from thee,
And all the glowing days bright gayety,
But night has come, the stars will shine
And in the darkness strange sweet wine
Will come to me. So daylight goes
Yet for a moment trails the sea with scarlet clothes.

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TONGUES OF THE SEA

At night I listen and far away I can hear the call of the sea,
The rhythmic chant of the voiceless waves, solemn and sad, and free.
Sweeping on o'er a million graves in the hollow home where they live.
Of all things mighty the untamed waves have all that a God can give,
They roam the world where the spirit lists, they beat on a strange, far coast,
They wander back on an endless track, a vast unnumbered host.
They lap the face of an earth subdued to the mighty power they hold;
No hand upraised may stay their course when they gather a million fold.
Ships and men, and the power they wield, the patience, the cunning, the skill,
What are these in the crashing seas where the grim waves work their will?
At night I listen and far away I can hear the tongues of the sea,
Speaking ever, yet speaking never, ceaselessly call to me,
At night I listen and far away I can hear the tongues of the sea,
They tell their tale in the roaring gale as they sweep their message to me.
At night I listen and far away the waves with their burden of tears

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Keep forever the ledger page of the swiftly moving years!
Kings and commoners, bound and free, age after age goes by
And only the waves as they chant their song listen and never die.
I lie and listen and hear them call and they flood the fitful gloom
With thoughts that tell how man must dwell in a narrow restricted tomb
While they reach back to the nether years and chant of the days to come
With all the gladness that makes their song and the sorrows that make them dumb;
They tell of the freedom of fields afar, and they laugh at the woes of men
But the moaning cry when they break and sigh cries out to my heart again
And I feel they know that Time and Tide as they hold the ash of the years
Have held compassion for hopes of men, their efforts, their faults, their tears.
At night I listen and far away I can hear the sound of the sea
Marking time on it's lonely rocks as it patiently waits for me.
The waves well know that the hour will come when my tide will turn and free
We'll go together through changing weather to the heart of the throbbing sea;
Back to where in the lonely track of a distant gleaming sea

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I look down deep in the heart of waves, and the waves look back to me;
Where both shall wonder as stars go out and hot suns glow and fade
Why earth and sea and eternity and man and his dreams were made.
At night I listen and far away I can hear the call of the sea,
The rhythmic chant of the wordless waves, solemn and sad and free.
They call to me from the boundless deep, from the pit of the burned out years,
Wise with the wisdom of ages past, and sad with their unshed tears.

NEW LANDS AND NEW MEN

So has it always been: Egypt, Athens, Carthage, Rome,
The index finger of the race forever pointing to a newer home,
The strong blood surging to a fresh, clean place.
New skies, new seas, and then again new dreams,
New peoples springing from a good new soil;
New life that radiates in vivid streams
Revitalizing ancient things. So men shall toil
And growing old shall rest; but when the thing is done,
Their sons shall cast it all aside
And seeing visions in the setting sun,
Shall journey forth with naked purse, but strong with pride.

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A MOMENT AT THE GRAND CANYON

I knew that others followed for the train had been well filled
With tourists really anxious to be overawed and thrilled,
But somehow when I wandered to that jagged awful rim
I forgot the ones about me; far away, and faint, and dim,
Were the cities I had seen, were the people I had known
And suddenly deserted I stood there quite alone.
Here ended earthly questing:—from the broken jagged sod
Marched the great vast naked mountains through the soundless halls of God.
In the arched blue of the heavens where the sun rode on his way,
There was still the solemn splendor of the planetary day.
But here was God above me, and a new God down below,
And the same God all about me, and I seemed to strangely know
That never in the future, in the crowded city street
Would the vision be quite absent, that when I went to meet
The hard exacting labor of the cold prosaic day
I would see God's marching mountains in unapparelled array—
See and know and feel forever where my weary feet might plod,
That I'd looked for one brief moment down the soundless halls of God.

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A SUN BURNED CANYON TRAIL

It's a dusty road when the summer sun
Beats down red hot, and one by one
The blades of grass that banked its side
Have turned to brown and sighed and died;
But nevertheless its a wondrous trail
Where birds sing free, where winds call "Hail!"
And canyon spirits are whispering there
In the dusty, hazy scented air.
And no one knows where the canyon goes
And its brown and dusty, and yet no rose
Can tilt the nose of a passerby
Like a canyon trail 'neath a deep blue sky—
Oh here is a scent yet the rose has fled,
Oh here breathes life though the flowers are dead!

THE PRETENDERS

The King is dead! But the court still lives
And it shines its armor and curls its hair
And still pretends that the king is there.
The worms have eaten, the rust has come,
The trumpets silent, and stilled the drum,
But some strange hope forever gives
The puppets that vainly surround a throne;
A power to strut when they stand alone—
When the king is dead, and their hope is gone,
And the world forgetting has traveled on.

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POINSETTIA

A poinsettia, glowing and red,
Proudly lifted its gorgeous head;
It looked about it and saw the rose,
And up the hill where the poppy grows
It noted the blue of the bluest sky,
And the greenest of grasses filled its eye,
And the house that stood but a space away
Was orange and purple with dabs of gray;
And the gay flower smiled with a well pleased smile
"To be beautiful here is a thing worth while,
But to rank them all when they're all so fine,
Is a gift indeed, and that gift is mine—
My crimson lips on the face of day
Give love and laughter to light your way."
And the rich red flower grew still more red
As it blushed and nodded its gorgeous head.

WANDERER, REST THEE HERE!

If this is the end of the long, long road,
And the curtain that drapes thy dreams
Be a mesh of flowers o'er the dark abode,
And the kindly sunlight gleams
With a gay abandon a space above,
Then Wanderer rest thee here,
Where long kind days will give a smile
And the soft rains give a tear.

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ARIZONA NIGHT

As white as chalk the paths beneath a strange and dream shot moon
Lead out across an endless world, and vanish all too soon.
Grotesque as satyrs yucca palms stand guard as though they feared
The shadows which their bent arms cast, the night winds strange and weird
Bring odors that the day distilled, the stars superbly bright
Seem studded but an inch apart in fields of hematite.
A desert land? Ah yes, perhaps, yet dreams go hand in hand
With one who goes across the night in this strange silent land.

YOUTH

I dance o'er the grave of a million years,
No time nor tide I know,
And only the flowers that bloom today
Are the sweetest flowers that grow.
The hollow sound in the empty halls
Where ghosts go flitting by,
Oh! You may listen and looking back,
Remember and give a sigh,
But not for me are the faded flowers,
Nor the kingdoms passed away,
For this I say: Though the whole world die,
Still Youth will have it's day.

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"JAMES! ADMIT NO CUSTARD PIES!"

A movie king and a movie queen and the ghost of a custard pie
Met somewhere out in Hollywood, and they gave it a glassy eye.
"You remember the time" said the custard pie, "when I was nice and new"
"And you were poor and out of work, and dollars were hard and few?"
"And who are you?" said the movie king, "Tut! Tut! Be on your way!"
And "Upon my word!" said the movie queen, "You have your nerve, I'll say!"
The movie king in his limousine spoke to the movie queen
And both with a most disdainful air sped from the vulgar scene.
And the custard pie was all broke up, and he shed some custard tears,
"Oh, ain't it sad" said the custard pie, "They forget their leaner years"
"They forget the time when they looked on me as a tried and a trusty friend"
"But times have changed, and I am old" and he tottered to his end.
And the movie king when his car reached home said with snapping eyes
To his servant James "My man, take heed, I'm at home to no custard pies!"

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THE DESERT

O shadows that lure! O heat that cries
From the deathly stillness of blinding skies.
O sand that eddies! O sand that blows
From God knows where, to where—God knows.
O desert that beckons, brave men who went,
Aye, bravely enough, but broke and spent
Who kissed the cactus and cursed their fate,
As you clutched their throats with red hot hate,
Is the thing that creeps o'er your shimmering breast
A sigh from the bones that will not rest?
Is the lure that breathes in your dreadful breath
The calling of voices that long knew death?

THE "ANCIENT MARINER" ALIGHTS IN LOS ANGELES

"I have braved many perils" the Mariner said, "and many strange sights have I seen"
"But crossing Broadway where it intersects Fifth has got them all beaten, I ween."
Then he hitched up his trousers and tightened his belt and joined that venturesome crew
That surges and urges and eddies about, but manages still to get through.
He wildly inspected a motor car then that missed his left leg by an inch
And he muttered a word that a deacon won't use unless in a very tight pinch,
But a lady was prodding his ship on the left and a street car approached on the right,

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So he hastily strode the full breadth of the road, it
was safer to hurry than fight.
"I have braved many perils" the Mariner said, "And
I've fought with the fierce Albatross,
"But this is a moment, the proudest of all, for believe
me I *did* get across."

THE BUILDER

Here is a haven a traveler said
And he picked a hard and a stony bed—
A little room in a crowded street
Where the ends of the earth would often meet.
Yet he couldn't twist and he couldn't turn
Where the fitful light of his life would burn;
But he found the thing of his Heart's Desire—
A book, a nook, and a quiet fire—
And that was a haven indeed for him;
But the other I tell of is somewhat grim:
Here is a haven a traveler said
And he followed the paths where the deserts led.
There was nothing there till the traveler came,
But he gave it toil and he gave it name
And the thing that was barren came to flower
In exchange for the work of each burning hour.
The blossoms came where the spade had struck
And out of the refuse lands and muck,
In fact from out of the world's back yard
He made a garden—but the day was hard
And the traveler long since gone to rest,
But lands where he builded, we call them—*WEST*

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